

## Searching for Happiness

By Robert W. Reed

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I began about three or four weeks ago to preach a message titled "Searching for Happiness," and as I told you before, I decided, "Well, let me preach first a message on Solomon." And while I was studying for that message, I said, "Well, let me preach a message on Solomon's Temple." So now we'll come to the message I started three weeks ago titled "Searching for Happiness." And I'm glad I've waited because it's given me some time to get a better perspective on this book.

Let me remind you of this before I read: Romans chapter 15 and verse 4 says that the things that were written before — that is, the Old Testament — were written to give us hope; 1 Corinthians 10:11, the things that are written before are written for our warning; and then in 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 16, "All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." So God has given us the entire Bible for our benefit.

Ecclesiastes chapter 1, beginning with verse 1:

"The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup>Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all *is* vanity. <sup>3</sup>What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?"

*Father, we thank You for this day. We thank You for the privilege again that You've given us to assemble together in Thy house with Thy people. Lord, as we come here today, we just ask, Lord, that You would meet with us. We pray that Your presence would be among us. We pray for the filling of Thy Spirit. We pray, Lord, that our worship today would be acceptable. We pray, Lord, that You would teach us, guide us, and lead us, and keep us on the straight and narrow path, for it's in Christ Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

You may be seated.

The book of Ecclesiastes is probably one of the most misunderstood books in the Bible, and I'm just going to say up front that it is a very encouraging book to the followers of Jesus Christ. It is very positive, it is very joyful, and it is very hopeful, but it is very gloomy to the rejecters of Christ.

Now, we just read the first three verses, and you say, "How are you getting joy and hope and all these things when it begins with the word "vanity" five times in verse 2 when it says, "[Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.](#)" That word "vanity" is a key word in this book, and it's used about 35 times throughout the book of Ecclesiastes.

When I was about 17 or 18 years of age, my philosophy of life was to eat, drink, for tomorrow you die. Now, I didn't know that was in 1 Corinthians. I didn't quote it exactly that way, but I used to look around me as I was growing up without Christ, without any religious training, and I would look around me and say, "What's the use?" I would look at my family; I would look at my relatives; I would look at other people. I looked at the school; I looked at all the things in life, and literally that was my philosophy, because I saw that you spend the first 18 or 20 years of your life in school, and then you spend the rest of your life working, and then you die. And that's sort of what the lost man has to look forward to.

So as we come to this book, we find that it is a very positive, a very joyful, a very hopeful and encouraging book, but we probably won't notice much of that until we get to our third point in our sermon today. So what I want to do this morning is give you an introduction to the book of Ecclesiastes to the best of my ability; then I want to present to you some of the things that the author pursued, and then, number three, we want to consider the conclusion to the whole matter. The book is actually divided up into about four sections.

## **Introduction to the Book of Ecclesiastes**

Now, the title "Ecclesiastes" basically has the idea of assembly or a gathering or congregation. It suggests one who speaks to an assembly. So in verses 1 and 2, we have these words: "[The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.](#)"<sup>2</sup>[Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.](#)" I believe that Solomon is the author of this book. The reason I say that is because there are those who say that he's not. But we find here in verse 1 and in verse 2 and in verse 12 and a few other places in the book that the author calls himself the son of David, the king in Jerusalem. He calls himself a Preacher, as well, and he says in verse 12, "[I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.](#)" Well, Solomon was the only son of David that was a king over all Israel in Jerusalem because under his son Rehoboam, the kingdom was divided. So I do believe that Solomon is the author of this book.

And this is just an opinion and I think others feel this way, but the Song of Solomon was probably written early in Solomon's life. The book of Proverbs was written probably in mid life or during the time that Solomon is learning wisdom and walking with God. But Ecclesiastes appears to be written toward the end of Solomon's life, and it is a record of his repentance for pursuing life without God. It appears that there's no real bitterness, but there's some lessons he learned that he's passing on to you and me. That seems to be the book of Ecclesiastes. Now, the date is around 1,000 B.C. I'm just rounding things off.

I believe that the purpose of the book of Ecclesiastes is to cause you and me to take a serious look at life in relation to God's Word. As a matter of fact, the book is a search for the key to the meaning of life. As we read through this book, we find that it is aimed at anyone who tries to figure out life apart from God, and Solomon even fell into that category for a period of time. The book demonstrates to man that which is "under the sun." That expression in verse 2 is used about 29 times throughout this book. So this book demonstrates to man that which is under the sun from that which is above the sun, that is, divine revelation.

Now, let's read from verse 1 again. I'm going to try not to turn to too many other places but to kind of hang out in this book, and I'm not even going to read a large amount of verses from this book. I'm just going to make reference to some verses because I want to be able to get through what I want to do this morning. But notice with me now as we come back to verses 1, 2, and 3, he says, "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup>Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all *is* vanity" — and this is true, by the way, if we're not walking with the Lord. And he says, <sup>3</sup>"What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?"

This book shows you and me the emptiness of life when we try to live it without God, whether we're lost or whether we're a Christian. There are different rounds of vanity that are mentioned in this book. Chapter 1 kind of sets the tone for the entire book. In other words, if life is vain — and it is if we're not saved — then how do we enjoy life? That's what this book is showing us. This book opens here in the first chapter with a fallen world revealing its vanity and the lack of substance and permanence and endurance and things of that nature.

Now, notice with me as we come to verse 2, he says, "[vanity of vanities.](#)" That's like the Lord Jesus saying "Verily, verily, I say unto you" — this double connection here. He said, "[Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all \*is\* vanity.](#)" As I said, this is a key word in the book. It's mentioned five times in one verse, and it's mentioned 35 times throughout the whole book. The primary meaning of "vanity" is "*that which is fleeting or passing away.*" The word "vanity" does not always mean wicked sin, but it describes the emptiness of a thing. We're going to read a passage later in chapter 9 and verse 9 where the Lord is basically saying to enjoy the vanities of this life as you live in this life, so vanity is not always wicked sin. Sometimes it is, but the primary meaning here is things that are temporal or brief or things that do not last. And that's what Solomon is talking about. He begins in verse 3 with our labor and in verse 4 with one generation after the next. He's talking about things that do not last, things that are passing, things that are short-lived, things that you cannot depend upon. He's talking about that which does not fulfill what it promises, the things that are empty.

Let me give you some thoughts on how the word "vanity" is used in other places. It is used with idols in Zechariah 10:2 because an idol can't help you. So when Solomon says "[vanity of vanities,](#)" he's talking about things that do not last, things that have no real substance to them. An idol can't help you, can't bless you. In James 4 and verse 4, man's life is as a vapor, that is, it's vain in the sense that it's short-lived; it's passing away; one generation comes, it passes away, and another comes. Psalm 39, verse 5, says, "[...every man at his best state \*is\* altogether vanity.](#)" Why? Our life is short-lived. Psalm 90, verses 2 through 10, gives us an estimate of the world, and then in Romans 8, verses 20 and 21, we see that creation was subject to vanity because of man's fall. So here we find in this text that the primary meaning of vanity is that which is fleeting, does not last, is temporal, it's brief, is passing away, it comes and it goes, and Solomon is going to illustrate that in this chapter.

Notice verse 3: "[What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?](#)" In other words, what's the point? Why bother working and living through this life, this endless cycle of work — get up in the morning and go to work and go to bed at night. It just seems like a poor return. I mean, you work all your life to eat and whatever. You give your whole life to it, and it just seems pointless. In other words, what profit, what gain hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun? The expression "under the sun" is interesting. It's used 29 times in this book in about 27 verses, and this term just simply is describing this life that you and I live, our life on this

earth, not the hereafter. You see, man must look above the sun to find divine revelation. He must look unto God. But “under the sun” is just describing our everyday life, the things that we do, our activities throughout our life. That's what this term means. And, again, we're talking now about life that is lived without God; it's vain, vanity of vanities, all is vain. So in the remainder of this chapter, Solomon is going to illustrate life with nature and other things. And I want you to really think about this.

Now, when you get saved, you have a purpose in life. When you know the Lord, there's a purpose. When you get up and go to work, there's something about all of that. Mothers are willing to take care of their children even if they're lost, but when they're saved and they raise their children for the glory of God, there's a purpose in life. So that's what we're going to see as we go through this book.

But I want you to notice as we read verses 4 through 11 that if God is not in this thing, there is an endless cycle of man, the earth, the sun, the wind and water. All it does is go round and round and round. It's the treadmill of life if you're not saved or if you're not walking with God. And it will get quite boring. It will get quite aggravating because, is this all there is to it? Again, you're born, you go to school a part of your life, you work the rest of your life, you die, you go in the grave. Is this all there is to life? And we know that that's not the case. It's sort of like that hamster on that wheel. I never had one of those ugly looking things in my house, but some people do. That thing will run and run, and then he'll stop, and he's at the same place where he started, and he looks around a little bit and takes off again. That's like the races. I've got some friends who love to watch the races. And think about this. For four hours they drive those cars wide open. They drive for four hours and hundreds of miles, and they end up in the same place they started. That's kind of ridiculous when you think about it, Amen?

So the world view of history is circular. Think about that. The world pagan view of history is just round and round; there's no beginning and there's no end. There's just no purpose in life. You just live and you die — especially if you believe in evolution and all this kind of stuff. But the biblical view of life is linear; in other words, it's a straight course. Where did it begin for us? It began at creation in the Garden of Eden. Our first parents were placed there, and this life will end at the second coming of Jesus Christ with the redemption of humanity and the Lord bringing about His people, His church, and so forth. So we see the beginning and the end; we see God's redemption;

we see all the beautiful things that God has provided. But when you look at it from a world view of history, it's just round and round and round and round. There's no beginning and there's no end. I wrote this down years ago, and it sums these verses up. It says, "The farmer keeps the mule to plow the corn in order to feed the mule." Now, just think on that a little while. A farmer keeps his mule to plow the corn so he can have the corn to feed the mule so he can have the mule to plow the corn. And this vicious cycle goes on and on and on, and this is sort of what this chapter is talking about.

Verse 4 says, "*One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.*" Think about that. Hundreds of generations have come and gone. Our generation will one day soon fade out, and the next generation will carry on.

He says in verse 5, "*The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.*" The sun's daily course is very repetitive. It has a routine. It comes up; it goes down; it comes up and goes down; it comes up and goes down. And this has been going on for thousands of years. And, again, the point is, what is the use of all of this? What is the use of working? What is the use of living? What is the use of all of this if God is not in the picture? Verse 6 says, "*The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.*" Again, the wind is constantly blowing in one direction or the other. Now, there's a reason for that. God has a reason for the sun coming up and going down and the wind blowing, but, again, we find here this constant repetition of things. He said in verse 7, "*All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.*" Again, we see here the cycle of evaporation out of the ocean forming clouds, raining over the land, and then running back into the rivers. You've got this huge circular motion of things that go on day after day after day.

Then Solomon said in verse 8, "*All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.*" Again, we find here that everything keeps going in circles round and round and over and over again, and things just keep moving on. We'll all get up in the morning and go to work, and tomorrow night we'll go to bed. We'll get up Tuesday morning and start all over again. That's what he's talking about.

Now, notice in verses 9 and 10 he said, "The thing that hath been, it *is that* which shall be; and that which is done *is that* which shall be done: and *there is no new thing* under the sun. <sup>10</sup>Is there *anything* whereof it may be said, See, this *is new*? it hath been already of old time, which was before us." He said there's no new thing. He's speaking of history, and he's talking about the issues in the past are issues that we're dealing with now. He's not talking about inventions and technology, but he's talking about human nature and the patterns of life. He's talking about birth and death and work and struggles and problems and issues that every generation faces, and he says there's no new thing under the sun. We see wickedness in our nation. We see sin running rampant. Well, it was there years ago. It was there in the days of Noah. It was there in the days of Lot. It was there in the days of Jeremiah and Isaiah. It was there in the days of Jesus Christ. So Solomon is just simply saying that, in history, these things have always been. We think, well, there's never been sin like there is today. Yes, there has. Read Genesis 6, the first ten verses, and see why God destroyed the entire world except for eight people.

Now, in verse 11 we have these words: "*There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.*" In other words, we quickly forget. We can't even remember the former generation, their achievements, their failures. We can't even learn from the generation that was before us. And have you ever tried to do any family history? I've done very little of that because I haven't really cared that much. You know, I'm glad I'm in the family of God. But, anyway, have you ever tried to do any research on your family history? We were talking about this just recently. We mainly have only one other person in our family who is still alive in her eighties and still knows the real history of our family, and every opportunity that I'm in Tennessee with her I sit down and talk with her. Everybody else is basically gone. Now, we have hundreds of relatives, but most don't know what happened 50 years ago. So we have a tendency to forget everything about the previous generation.

### **The Things the Author Pursued**

Now, let's step into our second point, and our second point is "The Things the Author Pursued," and I'm going to be reading in verse 13. This is Solomon, and a lot of these things happened when he was out of the will of God. I'm going to give you a

quote by another author. I don't think I've ever used it. I've had it for probably 15 years. But I want you to listen to this. It says:

**"The book of Ecclesiastes records the fruitless and painful efforts of one man to find meaning in life. The author plunged himself into the study of nature (chapter 1, verses 4 through 11)" — We just read that — "the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge (chapter 1, verses 12 through 18)" — We're getting ready to read that — "and pleasure (chapter 2, verses 1 through 11), the accumulation of possessions (chapter 2, verses 12 through 26), a fatalistic outcome on life (chapter 3, verses 1 through 15), the worship of self (chapter 3:16 through chapter 4:16), the doing of good works (chapter 5, verses 1 through 7), the attainment of wealth (chapter 5, verse 8, through chapter 6:12), and the pursuit of morality (chapter 7, verse 1, through chapter 12, verse 12)."**

That really sums up this entire book.

But we're talking about the things that the author pursued apart from God. We are going to read this entire chapter, and then we'll start skipping around a little bit. But notice the things that Solomon pursued, chapter 1, beginning at verse 12:

"I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup>And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all *things* that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. <sup>14</sup>I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit. <sup>15</sup>*That which is* crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting" — that is, missing or lacking — "cannot be numbered. <sup>16</sup>I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all *they* that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. <sup>17</sup>And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. <sup>18</sup>For in much wisdom *is* much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

Have you ever really thought about that? In these verses that we're reading right now we find here that Solomon's testimony is that he devoted himself to understand everything in life and nature and whatever he could possibly understand. He had studied and observed everything, and in the end, without the Lord's blessing, it brought him vexation of spirit. Now, let me say this. Wisdom is not wrong and it is not bad, but without the Lord, it's basically useless. Now, it can help us in our physical life,



keep us out of financial troubles and things of that nature, but notice in verse 18 he said, "For in much wisdom *is* much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." Do you know that the more we know, the more we see the sinfulness of man? In Romans chapter 9 and verse 2, the apostle Paul saw the sinful condition of Israel, and it brought sorrow to his heart. The more he knew about God and about sin, the more he saw the needs. In Revelation chapter 10, verses 8 through 11, we find that the writer, John, was told to take a little book out of the angel's hand and eat of it. The angel said it would be sweet as honey in his mouth, but it would be bitter. So John took the book and he ate of it, and it was sweet in the mouth like honey, but when it digested, when it went down into his belly, it was bitter because the Lord said that John had some more preaching to do — in other words, speaking of sin, rebellion, judgment, things that are going on in this world. I'm going to tell you something. If you study some of the things that I have studied about our country and our government and whatever, you could get depressed if you don't know God. You see some of the things this Empire has been involved in and what it's done to other people, even to its own people and killing over 3,000 unborn a day and these kinds of things, and this can grieve your heart. So the more we know sometimes, the more that we can be saddened as Solomon said here in this passage.

Now, I just read off a list from this quote of several things that Solomon pursued, but let me mention three things that he pursued. There are more than these, but I don't have six hours to preach this morning, so let me mention three brief things that he pursued without God:

**Solomon tried wisdom, learning**, as we've already seen here. Now, this is not an argument against education that Solomon is bringing in this book, but it is not the answer to everything in life. It is important, but without God, wisdom alone cannot bring satisfaction in your life. It cannot satisfy you. Wisdom alone cannot keep you from sin. The wisest man that ever walked on this earth outside of Jesus Christ fell into idolatry and horrible sin. And wisdom alone cannot give you contentment and peace in your heart. It can't do it. There has to be more than that. In the United States we can put a man on the moon, but we cannot bring peace in our own land and around the world. And we find that many are just basically educated beyond their intelligence. Wisdom alone cannot keep us out of sin and make us happy and give us contentment in our heart.

I'm going to be reading from chapter 2, verses 12 through about verse 17 or so, and as I read these passages, I want you to see here that wisdom is better than being a fool, but in the end, both the wise and the fool die, and wisdom can't do one thing for you in the grave; it can't help you in the grave, and that's what we're going to be getting at here. I'm beginning in verse 12, and Solomon said, "And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what *can* the man *do* that cometh after the king? *even* that which hath been already done. <sup>13</sup>Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness." That is very true. But then he says in verse 14, "The wise man's eyes *are* in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all." Do you know what that event is? Death. The wise man dies and he is no longer. The fool dies. In other words, they both go to the grave. Now, watch as we read on. Please bear with me. I'm going to get to the good part here on the third point. We'll get there as soon as possible.

But come with me, please, to verse 15: "Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also *is* vanity. <sup>16</sup>For *there is* no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now *is* in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the *wiseman?* as the fool." He's talking about their remembrance. The wise man and the fool dies, and how many remember them? Generations go by and they're basically forgotten. When you turned on your lights this morning, how many of you thought of Thomas Edison? Did you think of him when you flipped the lights on this morning? No. When you use the phone, if you used it this morning, how many of you thought of Alexander Bell? Did he come to your mind? No, you didn't think of that.

I know of people who live in North Hampton where I think Jonathan Edwards' grave is. I believe his grave is somewhere in that area. (His grave is at Princeton Cemetery in Princeton, New Jersey. I checked on line. Is the North Hampton you were referring to close to Princeton, New Jersey? If so, the grave would still be in the area). And I know people who live in the same town, and most people in the town don't even know Jonathan Edwards ever lived. They don't even know he ever existed. I told a man about ten years ago that he could probably find his grave, and he said, "Did he live here?" I said, "You can probably find his grave if you look for it," and he said, "So he lived here? Now, who was Jonathan Edwards again?" People don't remember most

of this. It doesn't even matter to most people. And that's what Solomon is saying. He said the fool and the wise man, I mean, when you're dead, you're dead. It's over.

Well, notice as we read on. He said as we continue in verse 17, "Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun *is* grievous unto me: for all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit. <sup>18</sup>Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. <sup>19</sup>And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise *man* or a fool?..." Well, I can tell you he was a fool. So Solomon is worried about leaving everything he had worked for and accumulated, and he said, "I don't even know who I'm going to leave this to. Will he be wise? Will he be a fool?" Well, Rehoboam turned out to be a fool, and the kingdom was split under his reign. He was a fool just like his father was a fool at times. So we don't even know that we're going to leave any wealth to somebody who deserves it or even can handle it.

We find this wisdom again in chapter 7. Then in 1 Corinthians 8:1, we know that "Knowledge puffeth up." It causes us to be prideful if there's no charity, no love and those kinds of things. Second Timothy 3:7 speaks of those who are "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." So what I'm getting at is that Solomon pursued wisdom and he began pursuing it apart from God at a time in his life, and he regretted that. Philosophy defined, that is, wisdom without God is — this is a quote — "*that science of knowing more and more about less and less until one finally knows everything about nothing.*" One man said, "If ignorance is bliss, then I'm a blizzard." We find that Solomon was pursuing the things of this world without God at one point in his life. And, again, that's the reason I preached on Solomon and Solomon's Temple before I came back to preach on this.

**But not only that, we find that Solomon pursued wealth.** He pursued every luxury and materialistic thing that he could get his hands on. We find in this chapter great houses, pools of water, beautiful gardens, servants, music, entertainment, wonderful food, flocks and herds and silver and gold, and on and on the story goes. Notice as we begin in verse 1 of chapter 2. Solomon said:

"I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also *is* vanity. <sup>2</sup>I said of laughter, *It is* mad: and of mirth, What doeth it? <sup>3</sup>I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see

what *was* that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.”

It looks like Solomon even got drunk and took notes on it. And then he tells us, “Hey, this is not the route to go.” He says in verses 4 through 8:

“I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: <sup>5</sup>I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all *kind of* fruits: <sup>6</sup>I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: <sup>7</sup>I got *me* servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: <sup>8</sup>I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, *as* musical instruments, and that of all sorts.”

In other words, Solomon gathered every pleasure to his flesh, his eyes, his ears, his mouth — whatever. He withheld nothing from himself. He accumulated everything he could get his hands on, and the conclusion of all that without God is in verses 9, 10, and 11. He said:

“So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. <sup>10</sup>And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. <sup>11</sup>Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all *was* vanity and vexation of spirit, and *there was* no profit under the sun.”

And that's the end result whenever we try to do anything or have anything or accomplish anything without the Lord.

**One other thing that he went after was women.** We looked at that a few weeks ago. You see, he collected women as some people collect postage stamps. He had a thousand women that we know of. And instead of seeking a virtuous woman and living with that woman, he sought a multitude of women even from all nations that turned his heart from the Lord and caused him to end up in idolatry. They turned him away from the Lord. A wise and upright woman is a rare thing, and Solomon finally admits this. Notice what he said in verse 26 of chapter 7: “And I find more bitter than death”

— What? — “the woman, whose heart *is* snares and nets, *and* her hands *as* bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.” And Solomon was taken by her. Again, he wasn't seeking a virtuous woman to raise his children with and to live with the rest of his life. We're going to read a verse on that in a moment. But we find in verse 28 that he basically says he couldn't even find a good woman. Well, look where he went to find them. Many of them came out of idolatrous countries.

### **The Conclusion of the Whole Matter**

Turn back with me, please, to chapter 2, and we're going to come to the conclusion of the whole matter. Now, I don't want to run out of time because this is important and because you're saying, “Brother Reed, you told us that this is a very positive and uplifting and encouraging book, but we haven't seen that yet.” Well, now in our last point I'm going to read the verses that show us that it is and show us the whole point of this book, the conclusion to the matter. But I want to give you just a few other verses. And don't even turn to these. Write down Jeremiah chapter 9. In Jeremiah chapter 9, God is speaking to Israel, and He said in verses 23 and 24, “...Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty *man* glory in his might, let not the rich *man* glory in his riches:<sup>24</sup> But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me...”

Now, there's more to that verse, but do you know what we end up with? We end up with basically three things. Without God, we end up with the pursuit of wisdom and might and riches. That's the story in the Garden of Eden. When Satan came and tempted our first parents in Genesis 3:6, he spoke of The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and he said it's good for food — that's physical pleasure; it will delight the eyes — that's pride and power; and he said it will make one wise — the wisdom of this world. Jesus was tempted in Matthew 4, verses 1 through 11. When He was hungry, He was tempted — the lust of the flesh; He was tempted with the kingdoms of this world — the lust of the eyes; and He was tempted with the pride of life when Satan said cast Thyself down and so forth. The Lord couldn't be tempted as we are, but He was tempted with the same things. Then in 1 John chapter 2, verses 15 through 17, we're told to love not the world. In the world there are three divisions of temptation: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. We can't get away from

these things. This is the trinity of the temptation of the world, and that's exactly the three major things that Solomon went after.

Now, let's come and notice the very encouraging things that we'll find in this book. I'm in chapter 2, and I'm going to read the conclusion verses in each one of these chapters without reading the chapters. The book is basically divided into four discourses, and each discourse is brought to a final conclusion, and we're going to read the conclusion. It's sort of like singing a hymn that has four stanzas and then singing the chorus. In other words, we have some very similar words in each one of these conclusions. First of all, I'm going to read verses 24, 25, and 26 of chapter 2, and this is the conclusion of chapters 1 and 2. He says in verse 24, "*There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.*" Are you noticing the words? Our labor and joy is given to us from God. Now, we're coming to these conclusions for a man or woman who has a love for God and is working for God and living for God. In other words, when God is in every part of a person's life, we can enjoy some of these vanities of life. Remember I told you that vanity is not always wickedness or sin or whatever. Sometimes it's just that which is not lasting. Our physical life is going to come to an end one day, but we can enjoy this life as a testimony. The food we eat doesn't last, but we can enjoy that. We can enjoy our marriage, our children. We can enjoy our homes. We can enjoy our clothing that we wear. We can enjoy all these things if our life is being lived for the Lord.

Now, look at this. Verse 25 says, "*For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I?*" Then he said in verse 26, "*For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and*" — What's the next word? — "*joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.*" So the man that lives for himself and accumulates all these things, I mean, they're going to pass away; he's going to pass away, and it's all vanity and vexation of spirit; it's useless; it's passing away. You can have all the riches in this world and never enjoy them. You can have the greatest food. I can give you some examples of some rich people over the years who couldn't sit down and eat a meal like you're going to eat today. There are things they couldn't eat at all. So according to chapter 6, verses 1 and 2, it's God who gives us the power to enjoy the things that we have.

Now, if we were to compare chapters 1 and 2 before we get to the conclusion, what do we have? Vanity, sorrow, sadness, vexation, madness, folly, and despair. But when we come to the conclusion, we learn that we can enjoy life because it is a gift of God. Our conclusion is that all good things are given to us by God. In other words, in verse 26 the followers of God have joy and peace and contentment in their heart that the lost man doesn't have even though he has the same possessions. So we just went through the first stanza and then we read the "chorus," and the chorus ends with a very positive note with joy and peace and the gift of God.

Come with me now to chapter 5, verses 18 through 20. But first let me read you a quote. I found this in my notes, and I hadn't seen it in a number of years. This quote is on joy, and the author said:

**"If we focus on the gifts rather than on the Giver, we're guilty of idolatry. If we accept His gifts but complain about them, we're guilty of ingratitude. If we hoard His gifts and will not share them with others, we're guilty of indulgence. But if we yield to His will and use what He gives us for His glory, then we can enjoy life and be satisfied."**

That is so true. Now, notice with me in chapter 5. Chapter 5:18 and 19 concludes chapters 3, 4, and 5, and in those three chapters you find injustice, oppression, suffering, death, foolishness, hatred, envying, loneliness, adversity, and tears. That's what you find in chapters 3, 4, and 5, and here's the conclusion in verses 18, 19, and 20:

*"Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely" — in other words, it's proper — "for one to eat and to drink, and to" — What's the next word? — "enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun" — See, under the sun is not bad if God is in it; in other words, living in this world is not a bad thing — "he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion," that is, his lot. He said, <sup>19</sup>"Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the" — Help me out, church. It's what? — "the gift of God." Every bit of food you eat, clothing you wear, the automobiles you drive, the house you live in — everything that we have are gifts of God. And he said in verse 20, "For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart."*

Now, again, what do we find here? Everything is a gift of God. God alone can give power to enjoy the things He's given us. And God keeps us occupied with joy if we're occupied with Him. He even goes as far as to say here in verse 20, "For he shall not much remember..." In other words, we will not remember the bad days because of the joy and fellowship that God gives us with the good days. So when our heart is occupied with God and the gifts that He gives to us, we can enjoy food and clothing and health and sleep and even iced tea and sitting on the porch sometime and enjoying nature. We can enjoy these things because we recognize where they come from. Exodus 23:25 says, "And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee." James 1, verse 17, says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." So we're talking about the things in this life are gifts that God has given to us. So, again, we find here a conclusion.

Turn with me to chapter 8. We're going to read just one verse in chapter 8. Now, here's the conclusion to the third section, and the third section is chapters 6, 7, and 8 up to verse 15. And what do we have in chapters 6, 7, and 8 before we get to this conclusion? We have mourning and sorrow and sadness and madness and oppression and evil, and I just picked out a few terms that are in those chapters. So here's the conclusion, chapter 8, verse 15: "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun." So here's the conclusion: Mirth, not foolish laughter, not sitting around laughing at the stupid sitcoms and stuff on television, but to actually enjoy the things of God. Proverbs 17:22 says, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." So, again, we find a conclusion here. Three chapters again are talking about mourning and sorrow and sadness and madness and oppression and evil and all these things, and then we come to the conclusion here that man can be happy; he can have joy in his heart.

Let's jump over a little bit to chapter 9. In chapter 9 I'm going to begin reading in verse 7. Now, I challenge you when you go home to look on each side of these verses that I'm going to read. I'm going to read from verse 7 to verse 10, but just go back and look on each side of these verses. He's talking about death and the grave and all these things. But now beginning in verse 7, Solomon said, "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works." <sup>8</sup>Let



thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. <sup>9</sup>Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity..." See, in that verse vanity is not sin and wickedness and rebellion. Vanity there is just saying, "Hey, this is going to end one day." In other words, our life is going to end. Our labor is going to end. Our marriage is going to end one day. I mean, we don't like to think about that, but death will come and so forth.

So he's saying enjoy the life that God has given to you while you serve Him. And then he says this: "...for that *is* thy portion in *this* life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. <sup>10</sup>Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might; for *there is* no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." In other words, enjoy working, enjoy your family, enjoy the food that God has put on your table, enjoy the things He's given you because it's vanity, not in the sense that it's wicked and sinful, but in the sense it's passing; it's fleeting; it is not permanent.

Let's bring this to a real conclusion. Turn with me to chapter 12. This is the fourth section. Let me go ahead and read the last two verses of this chapter. But basically from chapter 8, verse 16, chapter 9, chapter 10, chapter 11, and chapter 12 is the fourth section, and it's coming to a conclusion here in these last few verses. Now, what do we find from chapters 9, 10, and 11? In general, we find death, foolishness, childlessness, idleness, laziness, and many other things. That's what we find, again, living apart from God. Solomon even addresses the young men in chapter 11, verses 9 and 10. He gives them warning: Enjoy life; walk with God, but he said there is a judgment day. In chapter 12 and verse 1 he said, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." And he describes growing old, and he says in verses 7 and 8, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. <sup>8</sup>Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all *is* vanity." So, again, we find vanity in these chapters. What is that vanity? Things that are passing away, things that don't last, things that come and go.

So he closes this book, but before I read the closing, let me back up and pick up our text in verse 9. The key to this entire book is right here in these last two verses, and that is that man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. God has created us for a purpose, and God is not a God who does not want you to be happy and enjoy life and have peace in your heart. We need to understand that. Now, there are

adversities; there is prosperity; there is life; there is death. There are all of these things in life, and yet if we live in perspective with the Lord, then we can enjoy things of this life.

Notice in verse 9: "And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, *and set in order many proverbs.*" In these verses Solomon is confirming that his writings are from the Lord and that they're upright and true. He's trying to say, "What I'm telling you is the truth, and this is from God." He said in verse 10, "The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and *that which was written was upright, even words of truth.*"<sup>11</sup> "The words of the wise *are as goads...*" Remember us looking at that word "goad" in the book of Acts? A goad is like a prod. And what does it do? It causes you to get the point. Do you get that? You get the point. All right. Then he says, "...and as nails..." Nails are like tent stakes. They'll anchor you down and they'll stabilize you. He said, "...and as nails fastened *by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd*" — that is, the Lord —<sup>12</sup> "And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books *there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*" Can I get an Amen? We have the availability now of reading books on line or whatever where we don't have to buy them anymore, and — Trust me — it can become a weariness of the flesh.

But notice the last two verses. These are what we want to close with. But before I close with these, I want to read one other verse to you. You don't have to turn to it. See, you've not even had to leave the book of Ecclesiastes this morning. I want to read 1 Corinthians 15, verse 58. Some of you probably have that verse memorized. I've got it memorized, but I'm turning to it to make sure my memory is right. After 57 verses dealing with the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the saints and our hope of Heaven, Paul closes this chapter in verse 58 and says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Man's labor upon this earth without Christ is all in vain — his birth is in vain; his life is in vain; his work is in vain; his death is in vain. It's all vanity of vanities without the Lord Jesus Christ. As Christians, if we will be followers of God and let Him be the priority of our life in everything we do and in every decision that we make in life, then our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Notice in closing Solomon says in verses 13 and 14, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God..." We find that fear mentioned again in 3:14 and 7:18. And then he says, "...and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man." <sup>14</sup>For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil." We see very clearly in the closing remarks here that this is the conclusion that I believe Solomon comes to in his later years. He didn't even take his own advice in the things he wrote in Proverbs, but now I see a confession; I see repentance. I don't really see bitterness, but I see a man who has wasted some of his life, and he's come to repentance, and he closes this book and said, "These things are of God. They're true. I affirm that these things are true. Learn from these things." And he closes with, "Fear God, and keep his commandments."

So the conclusion is, life is worth living if it's lived with God. And the choice is ours. We can have the joy of life, or we can have the vanity of life. I was thinking about an old song. I know you've heard it. It's titled, "My Way." Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley and people like that used to sing it. It's not a good song. I actually pulled up the words to that song this week. I don't know the history of the song or who wrote it, but the wording in this song is almost as if somebody is coming toward the end of life and "I did it my way." Then it reminded me of a hymn: "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

Let us stand and go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, we thank You this morning for Your mercy and love and kindness to us. We thank you for the hope and also the warning that's given to us in these Old Testament Scriptures. And, Lord, help us to view the book of Ecclesiastes in a different light. Help us to see the hope and the joy that is there. Help us to see the warning of not following You, but help us to see the goodness and the joy and peace the peace and the contentment and the mercy when we're willing to follow You. Father, we thank You for loving us. We thank You, Lord, we thank you this morning for our food, our health. We thank You for our clothing, all of Your provisions. We thank You for our homes, our shelter. Lord, we thank You for the coolness of this sanctuary this morning, especially this time of year here on the Gulf Coast. We thank You, Lord, for our automobiles, our homes. We thank You for everything that You've given to us. And, Lord, we know that You're the One who gives power to enjoy them. And, Father, we just thank You in Jesus' name for who You are and all the good gifts that You've given to us, for it's in Jesus Christ's name we pray, Amen.*

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